

Following announcements by two newly-elected governors that their states no longer intend to use federal high-speed rail funding, Vermont's congressional delegation today called on Transportation Sec. Raymond LaHood to reallocate a portion of the funding to Vermont's proposed Western Corridor project.

While Vermont was successful in securing more than \$50 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding to improve the southeast-northwest Vermonter line, the proposed Ethan Allen Express Improvements and Extension project was unsuccessful in receiving funding. The project, which would improve passenger rail from Rutland to Burlington, was lauded by the Federal Railroad Administration and scored competitively in the High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) application process, but did not receive federal investment due to limited funds.

Citing decisions by the incoming governors of Ohio and Wisconsin to forgo \$400 million and \$810 million respectively in HSIPR funding, the Vermont delegation asked LaHood to direct the unused funding to Vermont's high-quality Ethan Allen proposal.

"We strongly encourage you to consider Vermont's project in the reallocation of HSIPR funds," Leahy, Sanders and Welch wrote. "Success in establishing a national rail network will ultimately depend on supported passenger rail services – such as the Ethan Allen Express – feeding passengers to major hubs throughout the country. Vermont has been doing this since 1995 and looks forward to continuing to contribute to our nation's rail infrastructure."

Leahy said, "It is important that Secretary LaHood know that Vermont stands ready to move forward immediately with expanding rail service to communities along our Western Corridor. Upgrading the Western Rail Corridor has long been a transportation priority in Vermont, and we have a unique opportunity now to take advantage of Vermont's strong application."

Sanders said, "Federal support for Amtrak's Ethan Allen Express is extremely important for the economic and energy future of the region, most importantly Vermont's western corridor. I hope the secretary will see fit to support this investment in Vermont's public transportation. While other states may not want to move aggressively toward a clean energy future with rail travel, Vermonters would be more than happy to take the lead in energy efficiency and higher-speed rail."

Rep. Welch said, "If Ohio and Wisconsin don't want to invest in high speed rail, I know some folks in Rutland, Middlebury and Burlington who would gladly put this money to good use creating good jobs, improving our transportation infrastructure and expanding travel and tourism businesses. This project is ready to go and has widespread support from state officials, the business community, and the towns and cities along the Western corridor. I hope we can convince Sec. LaHood that Vermont is ready, willing and able to get to work."

The delegation's letter is copied below:

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
United States Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

We understand that the U.S. Department of Transportation intends to reallocate unused High-Speed Intercity Passenger Rail (HSIPR) funding from states that have decided not to move forward with their funded projects. On Monday, November 16, 2010, at the conference of the U.S. High Speed Rail Association, you stated that funds are to be redistributed in a professional way in places where the money can be well spent. We write to bring your attention to such a project, Vermont's unfunded Ethan Allen Express Improvements and Extension application.

We understand the State of Vermont's Ethan Allen Express Improvements and Extension proposal ranked near the top of the HSIPR FY 2010 and 2009 applications but was not funded due to inadequate funding at the federal level. During a Federal Railroad Administration briefing on November 3, 2010, concerning Vermont's application, the FRA lauded the quality of Vermont's application. With the unused funds now becoming available, we believe that Vermont's project, with a federal participation request of \$59,271,693, can provide an immediate and substantial contribution to the national rail network, and accomplish the goals set out in the National Rail Plan:

1. Linking Metropolitan Areas (Burlington, Albany and New York City): The route of the current Ethan Allen Express and its proposed service extension to Burlington encompasses a population of 10,852,559 according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census.
2. Intercity Passenger Rail Service Integration: The Ethan Allen Express is part of the national rail network, which links with other northeast passenger rail routes through New York's capital corridor.

Vermont has been unwavering in its commitment to intercity passenger rail. The State spends approximately \$5 million annually to support two Amtrak routes and has invested significant capital resources to maintain and upgrade rail infrastructure. Amtrak considers the Ethan Allen Express extension to Burlington critical to revenue generation (resulting from additional ridership) and the continued sustainability of the service.

Vermont has also been at the forefront of moving expeditiously on existing HSIPR projects. Vermont was approved for 'fast track' and was the second state to begin work on ARRA Track 1a projects. The Ethan Allen Express project can similarly proceed to the construction phase quickly.

Success in establishing a national rail network will ultimately depend on supported passenger rail services – such as the Ethan Allen Express - feeding passengers to major hubs throughout the country. Vermont has been doing this since 1995 and looks forward to continuing to contribute to our nation's rail infrastructure.

We strongly encourage you to consider Vermont's project in the reallocation of HSIPR funds. Please do not hesitate to call us should there be any additional information we may provide.

Sincerely,

PATRICK LEAHY

BERNIE SANDERS

PETER WELCH